Quarterly Journal of the McHenry County Historical Society & Museum

Tracer

We engage and educate current and future generations by preserving and sharing McHenry County History Winter 2025 Issue 180

Inside this issue:

About MCHS 2
America 250 in 2026 12
Camryn Cook's Winning Fike Essay....11
Death of Charles Morris 4
Early Photographs WANTED 15
From Your Tracer Editor....9
From our Board President....2
Heritage Quilters 13
How We Dodged a Bullet 14
MCHS Facts 5
Mystery Photos....15
New in our Research Library....16
Nancy Fike Scholarship 2025....13
Welcome, New Staff Members!....3
Office & Museum Hours....2
Tracer History, Part 4 8

Exciting FIRSTS for 2025 !!!

- Now open during the Winter
- Hosted our Inaugural Book Club
- Hot Chocolate and History Event
- Winter Opening Ribbon Cutting
- First County Chronicles Lecture
- Our first Author Talk

Are you passionate about local history and want to make a difference?

We're seeking volunteers - Call Us!

2025 Museum Hours

Tuesday - Friday 9am - 4pm

Saturday 10 AM - 4 PM

March 22nd 11am-1pm

HISTOR-TEA Fundraiser

An afternoon of Womens' History and Tea

LECTURE: Casting A Historic Vote: Suffrage for Women in Illinois: FULL SERVICE TEA

Tickets: Public $50 : Members $45

April 5-12 Museum Week

April 24 Weavers & Spinners

May 9th Prohibition Lecture

May 10th Clothing Lecture

Railroads In Marengo and Union, Illinois

by CRAIG L. PFANNKUCHE

Editor's note: Craig spoke at our museum last October. His topic: **C&NW Railway: Union to Marengo**

THE STAGECOACH ROAD

The story of Mr. William Butler Ogden's work to build the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad (G&CU) is well known. The general plan to construct the right of way between Chicago and Rockford, on the way to Galena, was to parallel a stagecoach road which had been laid out by Frank Gifford of Elgin in about 1836. Stagecoaches of the noted Chicago stagecoach company, Frink, Walker & Company, began their appearance on that route (now US 20) from Elgin to Belvidere in late 1837. While the stagecoach route stayed where possible on high ground, railroad right of way surveyors could not do that.

There were two reasons why the still existing right of way was staked out where it was. First, a narrow, low, natural gap exists between the somewhat hilly stagecoach route and the south end of a long north to south ridge of ground. That gap became the objective of the G&CU's surveyors. Thus, once beyond the Fox River valley, the right of way shifted to a more northwestwardly direction away from the stagecoach route.

Second, a small community had already been settled at the gap where the stagecoach road and the railroad right of way would converge. That little village, first settled in 1835, was originally known as Pleasant Grove. When a post office called Marengo was established in January 1844, villagers adopted that name. It afforded needed freight revenue from the then sparsely settled area along the line.

There's a well-known legend that Ogden, unable to raise all of the funds necessary to build his road among eastern financiers, went out on trips to the area where he hoped to build and tried to sell construction bonds. In fact, Ogden did raise construction funds that way among Marengo residents. An original document dated April 14, 1851, held at the Chicago and North Western Historical Society archives in Union shows that William M. Jackson, a landowner east of Marengo, convinced nine other area landowners to buy the road's bonds, to the tune of $2,050. In return, the line's officers, for an additional donation of a portion of his land, allowed Jackson to plat a village site he called Union.

Craig Pfannkuche has been President of Memory Trail Research, Inc. since 1993, and the Genealogical Archivist for the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad Historical Society since 1984. He is on the Board of Directors of the Chicago Genealogical Society. He has presented numerous workshops in history, historical & genealogical research & archaeological techniques at both the local and national level.

continued on page 6

The Tracer is our quarterly print Journal for members. Published since May 1974, it features society news, photographs, reports and local history articles.

© 2025 McHenry County Historical Society & Museum
All Rights Reserved. - Published March, 2025

We were founded in 1963 - Our museum opened July 4, 1976

Our museum campus is located between Routes 20 and 176, at 6422 Main Street in Union, Illinois

MAILING ADDRESS ..... PO Box 434, Union, IL 60180
PHONE 815-923-2267
EMAIL ..... info@mchenrycountyhistory.org
WEBSITE ..... mchenrycountyhistory.org

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD
President ..... Robert Frenz
Vice President ..... Lonni Oldham
Secretary ..... Nancy Baker
Treasurer ..... Molly Walsh

Join our board: mchenrycountyhistory.org/board-opportunities

Tracer Editor & Designer ..... Don Rose

MUSEUM STAFF
Executive Director ..... Jolie Diepenhorst
Director of Operations ..... Patrick McDonald
Exhibits Curator ..... Siobhan Heraty
Bookkeeper ..... Cindy Simmons
Research Librarian ..... Russell O'Brien
Visitor Services Coordinator ..... Kris Kenney

OFFICE HOURS:
Year Around, Monday through Friday - 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM

RESEARCH LIBRARY
ONLY by appointment, after completing a research request online.
Free to members, $30 for non-members. Copy & Image fees may apply.

MUSEUM HOURS:
Our museum is open YEAR AROUND
9am - 4pm Tuesday through Friday
10am - 4pm Every Saturday, except major holidays

OUR MISSION
We engage and educate current and future generations by preserving and sharing McHenry County history.

OUR VISION
We endeavor to be a hub for collection, preservation and educational outreach reflecting McHenry County's history.

We are a 501(c)3 Illinois nonprofit.
We depend on you for our support.
We are not funded by local taxes.
Your membership & donations are appreciated.

To join us in **engaging volunteer opportunities**, please call our office at 815-923-2267, or send an email to: **volunteer@mchenrycountyhistory.org**

President's Column

From Our Board President

Benjamin Franklin once stated that "Change is the only constant in life." Here at the McHenry County Historical Society we certainly know the wisdom of Franklin's words. This past year has been filled with change – actually, I prefer to call it "transition."

Before I detail some of this "transition" I want to thank Karen Parks, my predecessor as Board President. Karen led our Society through four of the most difficult years in MCHS history. Covid in 2020-21 closed our doors for months, required numerous adjustments before we could re-open, and seriously affected our finances. Significant staff changes also affected our day-to-day operations. Through it all, Karen immersed herself in the operations of your society and led the Board and staff through these challenging times.

As to some of these "changes;" in July, Rachel Seidner resigned from a grant funded position to facilitate library research requests and to further the digitization of our vast collection of ephemera. Russell O'Brien stepped in to complete the grant and continues with us. Office manager, Lela Olson left us in October after three years of service to accept a position closer to home. And, Pat Merritt "retired" in November after 25 years of clipping newspaper articles for our Research Library. We wish all these individuals nothing but the best and thank them again for their service.

Kira Stell cared for, curated, interpreted and exhibited our collection for the past twelve years. Many will remember Kira for the great display of our quilts every January at the Opera House in Woodstock. She also inspired and designed the new Anderson Gallery which allows for a rotating display of our artifacts. Kira has started a new chapter in her career at the Cantigny First Division Museum in Wheaton, Illinois. The board thanks Kira for her many years of service to MCHS and wishes her well.

Along with change comes opportunity – a chance to take a fresh look at what we are doing and to embrace new ideas. We strongly believe we have embarked on that path with the employment of our new Executive Director – Jolie Diepenhorst. Jolie comes to us by way of museum experience in Denver and Milwaukee and then, most recently, at a site of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Edith Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois. The Board is pleased to have Jolie with us; she has hit the ground running, with both knowledge and enthusiasm, providing exciting new program ideas and optimized use of our resources.

Along with Jolie, Patrick McDonald, former Director of the Huntley Area Public Library District, is now our Director of Operations. Ken Hobbs has begun work in the newly created part-time position of Museum Maintenance Technician. Cindy Simmons continues her role as MCHS's excellent Bookkeeper. We are also very happy to welcome Siobhan Heraty to the MCHS family, as our new Curator. She comes to us highly recommended, after time at the Des Plaines History Center. Kris Kenney has joined us as our Visitor Services Coordinator. So many smiling new faces!

The Board of Directors is working very well with all our dedicated staff members. Together with our growing group of volunteers, and the support of our generous members, we believe we'll make significant progress for everyone in the coming years. We must embrace this time of transition and accept the challenges it offers.

Robert W. Frenz

Welcome, New Staff Members!

Jolie Diepenhorst, Executive Director

Jolie joined our staff last November. She is a passionate preservationist, historian, and community partner who loves historic buildings, diving deep into research, developing community-based programming, and establishing new partnerships. Originally from Texas, you can hear it in her voice; Jolie spent her college years in Denver, Colorado, sharpening her skills in public history and architectural history.

When not talking about the McHenry County Historical Society and its great potential, she enjoys touring museums, historic houses, downtowns and finding early 20th-century Carnegie Libraries. Jolie believes in the power of place to inspire and connect people, and she is dedicated to growing the McHenry County Historical Society & Museum to be the epicenter of history and knowledge for McHenry County residents.

jolie@mchenrycountyhistory.org - direct line: (815) 923-1262

Patrick McDonald, Director of Operations

A history lover and a former Director of the Huntley Area Public Library District, Patrick started at the Historical Society as a volunteer in 2024.

He received his Bachelor's Degree in English Literature and Philosophy from Stanford University, and his Master's Degree in Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

patrick@mchenrycountyhistory.org - direct line: (815) 923-1260

Siobhan Heraty, Curator

Siobhan joined the McHenry County Historical Society as Museum Curator in January 2025. She previously served as the Curator of Collections at the Des Plaines History Center from 2018 to 2025, where she managed the museum's collection, developed exhibits, and coordinated research. Earlier in her career, Siobhan served in collections roles at the West Chicago City Museum and the Lake County Discovery Museum and led tours and school programs at Cantigny Park's McCormick House.

Though she's been officially working in museums for almost ten years, Siobhan's life in museums started young. Growing up, Siobhan participated in Naper Settlement's Junior Interpreter program, demonstrating 19th century children's activities and chores for museum visitors, and led tours in one of the museum's historic homes as a high school student. Inspired by this interest in sharing history with others, Siobhan earned a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Notre Dame and a master's degree in public history from Loyola University Chicago.

A native of the western suburbs, she's excited to learn more about McHenry County's rich history. In her free time, Siobhan enjoys traveling, reading, knitting, and baking.

siobhan@mchenrycountyhistory.org - direct line: (815) 923-1263

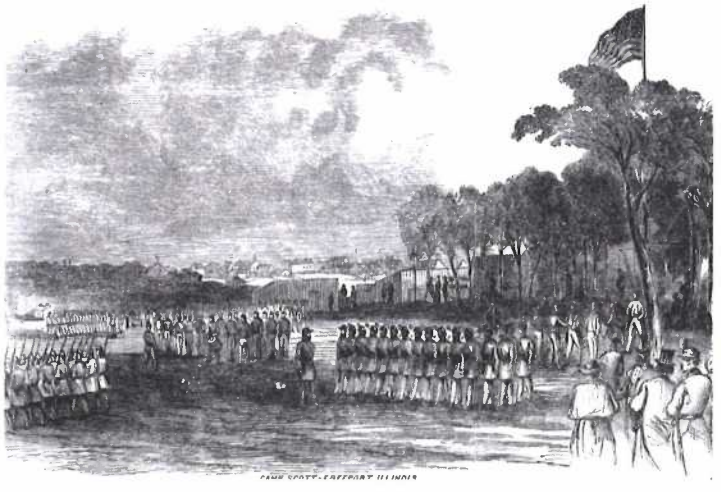
Death of Charles Morris, of the 15th Illinois Infantry

By ED URBAN

During the Civil War, after the U.S Army garrison in Ft. Sumter surrendered to Rebel attackers on April 13, 1861, a wave of patriotic fervor swept across the United States. Men everywhere scrambled to town meetings to scribble their names on enlistment rolls to pitch in to save the Union.

In McHenry County, meetings were held in most communities and companies were organized. The first companies came from Algonquin, Woodstock, and the Marengo-Union area. These units were eventually absorbed into the 15th Illinois Infantry Regiment with other companies from Illinois' First Congressional District.

Amongst the many men that joined the 15th Illinois was Charles W. Morris, a resident of Harmony in Coral Township. Charles' parents, Samuel and Sally Morris, came to Coral Township via the Erie Canal, and established a farm in the vicinity of the Harmony Cemetery. At the time the war broke out, Charles was attending school at Mt. Morris, Illinois, and not living in Coral Township. According to the Civil War muster roll records Charles was 19 years old, had red hair, blue eyes, and had been employed as a harness maker at the time of enlistment. It was in Mt. Morris that the patriotic bug bit Charles and he joined the Polo Guards organized by Captain Morton Swift of Polo, Illinois. This unit was subsequently designated Company H in the 15th Illinois. Charles found himself serving with his former neighbors from Harmony, receiving military training at Camp Scott in Freeport, Illinois.



The Polo Guards were ordered to report to Camp Scott for military training in Freeport, Illinois, on May 11, 1861. The men that gathered at Camp Scott on that day were still technically in the service of the State of Illinois. The day finally came to transition into Mr. Lincoln's Union Army on May 24th when Captain Pope, the future Major General, arrived in Freeport to swear the men into federal service. Charles proudly took the oath with the nine hundred or so other men. That same afternoon Charles, with other soldiers from the Polo Guards, went to the Pecatonica River to bathe. It is believed that Charles suffered from cramps while in the river. He cried out for help, but before anyone could assist, he disappeared under the water. The cannon from Camp Scott was taken to the river and fired to raise the body as was the practice of the day. It failed, but several days later his body surfaced.

On May 27, 1861, Charles' remains arrived in Marengo escorted by a guard of sixteen soldiers of the 15th Illinois. Eight were from the Wayne Rifles; the company from the Marengo Union area, and the other eight were from the Polo Guards. The June 1, 1861, edition of the Marengo Journal reported that the escort and pall bearers "proceeded through the village with martial music, the members of the Wayne Rifles here on furlough falling into line, and a number of our citizens, together with a number of teams and wagons, making up the procession." This procession proceeded to the Harmony Cemetery where according to the Marengo Journal "impressive funeral rites were performed." Over 1,200 mourners attended the funeral and "the soldiers saluted their comrade's remains by firing several volleys of musketry over the coffin."

Charles didn't die in battle, but nonetheless he lost his life while in the service of the United States. People in the Marengo area experienced the harsh realities of war only forty-one days after the stars and stripes ceased flying over Ft. Sumter. Unfortunately, over the next four years this experience became all too common for the little community.

Charles' tombstone in the Harmony Cemetery, located in McHenry County's Coral Township, toppled over many years ago and is slowly sinking into the ground (photo below). However, it remains as a testimonial to a young soldier who died only a few hours after swearing his allegiance to the Union Army.

Editor's note: An article with more detail about Charles Morris unfortunate drowning may be found online at this location: <newspapers.com/article/freeport-journal-standard-15th-illinois/10292566/>

MCHS Facts:
What WE do for YOU and other fine county citizens
Please lend a hand.

• Our website, mchenrycountyhistory.org is undergoing changes, so please bear with us as that effort continues to evolve.

• In 2026, we'll celebrate the 50th anniversary of our museum's opening on July 4th, 1976. This is very much a top-of-mind opportunity for us - you'll continue to hear more. America250 will also be celebrated nationwide during that year, and we'll play a key local history role. Your input will be appreciated.

• In 2025, the McHenry County Historical Society is celebrating its 62nd anniversary. The Society and its members have a proud track record, rich in preservation, education, and entertainment contributions to McHenry County. We continue to evolve, focused upon HISTORY EDUCATION, CIVIC AWARENESS AND PRESERVATION. Our board remains firmly committed to our mission.

• We spearheaded efforts to develop a McHenry County Historic Preservation Ordinance in 1990. Most larger municipalities followed our lead with their own local ordinances.

• We restored and continue to preserve the 1847 Gannon log cabin, 1867 Pringle School, 1886 Seneca Town Hall, 1895 West Harmony School, 1898 Riley Methodist Church and one of the 1950s Orsolini Modern Tourist Cabins from Richmond (reconstructed inside our museum!)

• Our cabin was built in 1847 by Luke Gannon near Crystal Lake and moved to the McHenry County Fairgrounds many decades later. In 1980, it was moved to our museum campus in Union. We have it furnished for the period and open it up throughout the year for events, school tours and more.

• Now, as it approaches 180 years of age, Luke's little cabin needs preservation work again. Please let us know, when you donate, that you'd like to earmark your donation to this important cause, or anything else that sparks your interest in local history.

• We create learning experiences and events. We participate in the activities of like-minded history organizations throughout McHenry and Lake Counties.

• We have fun while teaching, learning, and experiencing history together. Our outreach to young families continues. If your family would like to participate, please contact us.

• In 2011, we helped create the Northern Illinois Quilt Fest, in cooperation with many fine people across six Northern Illinois counties. We also support our own local Heritage Quilters group and their annual raffle quilt. Their second book, again edited by Jan Knight, along with Deb Silker and Don Rose was published in October 2023.

• Our almost-complete city block museum campus in Union includes the 1870 native limestone Union School and other properties. We encourage you to visit often to discover what's new.

• More than 11,000 square feet of exhibits at our museum in Union offer a trip through the history of our County from the Pleistocene epoch (Ice Age) to the Twentieth Century. McEachren Hall provides a chronological journey of the county's social history, including migration, economics, war, and sports. Eckert Hall showcases larger pieces and architectural displays. Also here is our relatively new Anderson Gallery, where we showcase many of our most popular artifacts. Deicke Hall showcases our county's rich agricultural history. Our entire exhibit space is temperature-controlled and accessible, with sitting space throughout. Docents are available on request.

• Some of our artifacts are cared for on-site, with over 7,500 square feet of space devoted to storage and preservation. During our 60+ years, many thousands of items, including personal items, furniture, tools, household and kitchen wares, paintings, textiles, which include clothing, shoes, historical dress, flags, quilts, tapestries, hats and gloves and much more, have been donated to our collection. Oversized items are stored in a 3000 SF off-site facility. Not all artifacts can be displayed, due to gallery space limitations, fragility, or need for restoration. Despite these constraints, our collection remains rich and varied, reflecting McHenry County history through carefully preserved artifacts.

• Explore genealogical resources to trace your family's roots through our obituaries or discover the history of your property. Our collection of local history publications provides a comprehensive overview of the county's evolution.

• We welcome school, adult, and private groups of all ages and abilities to visit us for tours. We require a docent to lead all organized, non-family groups of 6 or more. Advance reservations are also required. For more information, or to schedule, please contact us at: grouptours@mchenrycountyhistory.org or call 815-923-1261.

• Without any use of tax dollars, we continue to collect and preserve three-dimensional artifacts of local human progress. We are also bringing online collection access to our patrons in innovative ways - watch for this to increase in the next few years!

• Our educational programs foster thinking to help connect the realities of today with insightful perspective on the continuous flow of history.

• Our Historic Sites Committee has identified and provided commemorative plaques in almost one hundred notable locations throughout our county.

• We honor and assist local organizations and businesses with preservation of their unique historic legacies. In 2010, we held our Business Diamond Jubilee, saluting McHenry County businesses in operation for 75+ years. If you run a legacy business, please reach out.

• Our museum provides a family-oriented entertainment and educational destination, uniquely and interactively telling the ongoing story of McHenry County and its people.

• As a resource for local history information, we field and respond to many daily requests related to preservation, properties, notable citizens, family history, business history, historic images and object conservation. Our skilled staff is always willing to hear of your interests. Uncover the captivating stories that shaped McHenry County at our museum today. To schedule an appointment or submit a research request, get started today on our website: mchenrycountyhistory.org

• Our research library (primarily free to members) houses thousands of books, pamphlets, photographs, postcards, maps, journals; business, club, school and governmental records; local history books, biographical files, scrapbooks, newspapers, phone directories, high school yearbooks and knowledgeable people with answers to all sorts of questions. We celebrated our 40th anniversary of library service in 2022. View the commemorative event flyer here:

mchenrycountyhistory.org/sites/default/files/2209-RL-40th-Brochure-DR.pdf

• Preserving community history provides multi-sensory collective memory. Ultimately, our goal is to encourage the appreciation of all aspects of our environment, both natural and manmade. Appreciation of history will most definitely enrich your family's lives and experiences.

• Those individuals who are sensitive to their environment make better citizens. Better citizens vote, they participate in community life and they teach their children by example.

Editor's Note: We update this list with each issue; always seeking your input to make improvements.

Railroads (continued from page 1)

A MARENGO REPUBLICAN NEWS article of September 12, 1935, copied in part from a May 5, 1852 list held at that newspaper's archives, listed forty-two Marengoans who signed up, giving an average of $25 each toward the railroad's build. With that type of support, there was no way the G&CU would bypass Marengo. The first revenue train steamed through Union into Marengo on October 18, 1851. It reached Belvidere weeks later.

MARENGO LED THE WAY

Of the two communities, Marengo was dominant, located four rail miles to the west of Union. This was due mainly to Marengo's presence on the stage coach route from Chicago to Galena as well as a north-south road (Illinois 23 today) passing through the village. No major roads traversed Union in the 1850s. The 1860 federal census of Marengo lists 130 individuals whose occupations are other than that of "farmer." Of those so listed, four were lawyers, five physicians, eight shoemakers and eight masons. One architect, a saloon keeper and a hotel owner were also listed along with two daguerreotype specialists (portrait photographers). Union, on the other hand, had only 32 residents not listed as farmers. There were no lawyers in Union and only one physician.

Marengo is described in the 1877 DIRECTORY OF McHENRY COUNTY (page 111) as hosting a wind mill factory, an excellent steam flouring mill and a commodious stone school building of seven rooms. One newspaper, the REPUBLICAN, lists six churches, three hotels, one planing mill, two livery stables, three dry goods stores, ten groceries, two banks, two boot and shoe stores, two drug stores, six doctors, two jewelry stores, two lumber yards, two lawyers and four ministers.

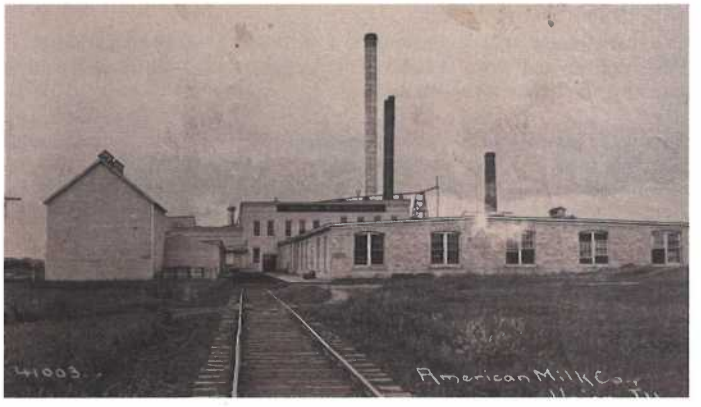
Editor's note: Above, Craig mentions the "1877 Directory" - It's yet another a small treasure housed in our Research Library. Here's how the title page reads:

BIOGRAPHICAL DIRECTORY OF THE TAXPAYERS AND VOTERS OF MCHENRY COUNTY; CONTAINING ALSO

A Map of the County; a Condensed History of the State of Illinois; an Historical Sketch of the County, its Towns and Villages; an Abstract of Every-day Laws of the State; a Business Directory; Officers of Societies, Lodges and Public Officers; a Department of General Information for Farmers, Dairymen, Etc., Etc.

CHICAGO: C. WALKER & CO. 1877

S. A. Randal was the agent in Union, a non-telegraphic station. With the exception of service in the Civil War, Avery was the railroad's Marengo agent from 1858 until 1882 when he became the McHenry County Clerk, moving to Woodstock, the county seat. By the early 1870s, Randal was replaced by Chester Houston as the Union agent. Houston served there into 1887.



Avery and his telegrapher had the responsibility, at least on November 27, 1868, of seeing to the safe movement of six trains westbound and six eastbound, of which three were passenger and three freights, passing through Marengo. Besides the normal freight deliveries of coal and other needed bulk commodities for both communities, the railroad delivered supplies to and picked up deliveries from a windmill building company and a foundry owned by a C. E. Kelly. Grain shipments were also picked up from C.W. Ingersoll's grain elevator. Additional traffic was generated from the Woodard Pickle Factory which opened in 1882.

Marengo certainly helped the railroad's bottom line. By 1882, besides an active stock yard, a large Shurtleff Lumber company, and a Borden's Condensed Milk and Bottling facility, the community was home to the Collins and Burgie Stove Company. Opening in Chicago in 1857, that company was purchased by a Marengo business group in 1891 and the stove company's plant was moved to Marengo in 1892. Once opened there,

the plant employed over 200 workers, producing over 100 cast iron parlor and kitchen "Leader" brand stoves per day as well as a wide variety of cast iron pulleys. Such companies certainly helped make shipments out of Marengo profitable for the railroad. Sadly, the stove company plant burned to the ground in 1907 and never reopened. Remembering the fire, an article in the September 29, 1973 MARENGO REPUBLICAN noted that "For years following the conflagration, the property served the hobos and 'rod' riders of the rails through Marengo as a rendezvous."

Union businesses also contributed to the railroad's profitability by providing traffic from the McHenry Butter Company plant, the Cooperative Canning Company, and the American Milk Products (later – National Milk Sugar) Company (photos of two at left).

INTERURBAN ELECTRIC LINES

In 1906, track laying crews once again appeared in Union and Marengo. An interurban line, the Elgin and Belvidere (E&B) electric railroad (photo, above right) was incorporated in 1905 with the idea of providing good transportation to individuals and light freight shipments to and between the communities named in the corporate title along with a connection to the Chicago, Aurora and Elgin traction line at Elgin. It was believed that the lack of hard surfaced roads in the area and cheaper freight rates than the Chicago and North Western could offer and an almost hourly passenger schedule would attract both passengers and freight away from the (C&NW) line, which it closely paralleled. The major stockholder and system manager was Bion J. Arnold.

A combination substation and passenger facility was constructed in Union (where the village water tower now stands) and company shops were built on the west side of Marengo where their rails interchanged with the C&NW. Formal service along the line began in February 1907. While the E&B was never especially profitable, summer picnic train specials did bring in much needed revenue. Union was an object of such traffic. Carl Gustafson, in his book, THE DAIRY ROUTE, quotes (page 20) a MARENGO REPUBLICAN NEWS article that, during the Prohibition years, everywhere else was dry territory. The cars were loaded to the guards. Lots of business rolled into Union – particularly from Rockford. Some taverns in Union, in those colorful days, took in as much as $3,000 per day. And the sky seemed to be the limit! All this helped the E&B because in addition to the "wet" customers who poured into Union, 6 to 7 barrels of whiskey were brought into Union via the E&B, of course.

Not only did Marengo host the shops of the E&B, it

was also the terminus of an additional rail line, that of the interurban Woodstock and Sycamore Traction Company (W&S) (photo above) which ran into Marengo from Sycamore (with an interruption of service for a time at Genoa, Illinois). The line was constructed on the present right of way of Illinois 23 and terminated just south of the C&NW track.

Operations on that line began in late 1911 with a McKeen car. With few residents available along the rural line to make use of the road, by the end of 1917 the W&S failed to generate enough revenue to continue operation. By late 1918, its rails were gone.

The same fate awaited the E&B. Despite being sold to a Marengo based business consortium in 1927 which infused the line with a bit of needed capital, the line, unable to deal with the economic problems of the deepening rural depression, went belly up in early 1930. Scrapping of the line began soon after.

continued on page 10

Tracer History Part 4
(from Volumes IV-VI, Issues 14-20)

BY DON ROSE

Welcome Back! Last Fall, there wasn't room in Tracer 179 for this fourth compilation. In May 2024's Tracer 178, I pulled notable content from five issues, #9 through #13 [AKA 1977's Volume III #2 & #3 (there was no #4) and Volume IV #1 through #3], including news in #12 that our founder, Dorothy McEachren, was stepping back after getting the collection & the people rolling at the Museum.

My first three compilations have given you a detailed look at our earliest issues. Most of them delivered snippets, very timely when released. With so many issues to work through, I'm stepping up the pace from this point forward to share the really good stuff!

So, here are interesting highlights with original titles (**BLUE**) and somewhat boiled-down text passages from Issues #14 through #20, published from Spring 1978 through Autumn 1979.

The Tracer team of Gwen Danner, Lucille Maguire and Thresile Mulvenna edited all seven of these issues. Number 20 is where the content starts turning towards more feature-length articles.

This was also when my camera shop in Crystal Lake was really taking off and around the time Nancy Fike and I worked on a photography display case at the museum. She warned me that getting involved at the museum would draw me in.

Volume IV

No. 4 mailed May 10, 1978 (Tracer #14)

ACQUIRING QUANTITIES OF PEOPLE

We are interested in acquiring quantities of people. We do not want them permanently, you understand, just for a couple of hours on one Sunday afternoon in June. For the Annual Meeting to be a success, there will have to be people. People to listen to brief reports. People to vote for candidates for the 1978-79 Board of Directors. And people to enjoy the program.

COLBY MOTORS

With our ad page begun in the last Tracer, we feel now is a good time to begin our stories about our advertisers. One of the first people to "sign on the dotted line"--so to speak--was Colby Motor Sales of Crystal Lake. The organization is today owned by Fred and Scott Colby but it was initiated by their Grandfather, Fred L. Colby, as a farm implement business. This was in 1886

As the years went by, he added Case, McCormick-Deering, steam engines, water pumps, wagons and other similar items. He also ran a blacksmith shop. Mr. Colby took his son into partnership with him in 1900. In 1904 they were franchised as a Ford dealership due to Henry Ford's realization that farm implement dealers with their mechanical "know-how" were natural born dealers for Fords, both to sell and service them.

At that time, a dealer was not restricted to one car; the Colbys sold not only Fords, but Overlands, Durants, Stars, Sterns, Knights, Willys-Knights, Oldsmobiles, Buicks, Chevrolets, Studebakers, Pierce Arrows, and DeSotos. In 1924, they signed a franchise with Walter Chrysler, and they still continue to sell this auto. They also handle Plymouths. Fred became a partner in the business in 1933, and his brother joined the company the next year. Colbys are now a tradition in Crystal Lake, their place of business is a daily "open house" for friends, and everyone who comes in is a friend.

BIG FOOT GENERAL STORE

The 1877 Directory of McHenry County lists a general store at Big Foot, at that time belonging to S. G. W. Mills, who had come from Williamstown, Massachusetts. The present store building was erected in 1892 for George Stewart. He operated a general store here until he sold out to a man named Guthrie, who in turn sold to Albert Tooker, from whom Ray Wilkinson and H. W. Binnie purchased both building and business. Then in 1908, Mr. Wilkinson bought out his partner and was the sole owner until he died in 1965. The Wilkinson family sold the store to Russ Gunderson. Although a writer, employed in advertising and sales promotion, his hobby was country stores. With this purchase, his dreams became reality. He became an antique merchandiser and a lecturer on country stores, and the Big Foot General Store has been described as the best restoration of a General Store in the Midwest. He has a superb collection of museum items in his store, and word has spread as to the authenticity of his treasures. People come from far and near to see the store.

LONG AGO OBITUARIES

Recently some clippings came into the possession of the museum and among them are the obituaries of two Harvard railroad men, a father and a son. I am sure if such an accident as killed the younger man happened nowdays, It would make the front pages of the local papers, and maybe get a paragraph in the big city papers, but appeared in the obituary column.

The catastrophe happened at DesPlaines where Edward A. Stoker, attempting to couple a slowly moving freight tain to a locomotive, missed his footing and fell across the tracks. He was immediately run over by a heavy freight car. He was not instantly killed but both thighs were crushed. He had to be taken to Chicago to get hospital care, but died that same evening. He had been born in 1858; at the time of his death was twenty-eight years old. His body was returned to Harvard where he was buried.

His father was a railroad crossing guard at the Ayer Street crossing in Harvard. These men were usually very well known and trusted in the communities they served, as they were responsible for the lives of all those who had occasion to cross the tracks, either on foot, or with wagons, buggies, surreys or horseback.

Children were taught to obey their orders implicitly, and the guard took his duties seriously. Gates and flashing lights were decades away in 1886.

The clippings make us suddenly realize how continual in our society the grief of sudden death is.

Volume V

No.1 mailed August 29, 1978 (Tracer #15)

ANNUAL MEETING

First highlight of the organization's year. President, Dorothy McEachren called the assemblage to order and welcomed all. In her brief report, she told of the plans to bring the restored log cabin from the county fairgrounds to the museum grounds, and also told members of plans to hire a curator-administrator.

These people were re-elected to the board: Alice Bailey, Hebron; Gwendolyn Danner, Harvard; Nancy Fike, McHenry: Don Hildebrand, Union; Shuji Kimura, Crystal Lake; Henry Marlowe, Huntley Dorothy McEachren, Woodstock; Thresile Mulvenna, Harvard; Dorothy Northrop, Union; Avis Pankonin, Alden. Directors elected for the first time were Nancy Petzelt of Algonquin and Clara Vogel of Greenwood.

SUMMER PROGRAMS

The new Sunday program series started off with Huntley Day. Directors Pat Williams and Henry Marlowe collaborated, enlisting other Huntley people.

The result was an outstanding program. Don Hildebrand, a director from Union, persuaded several businessmen to underwrite the Hiawatha Dancers from Elgin. It was a bright, sunny day and the rather large turn-out enjoyed the outstanding performance of these genuine Indian dancers. A month later, Girl Scout Day brought out many past and present scouts to look at the exhibits especially planned for them. The next two Sundays were given over to pioneer demonstrations with one also termed Alden Day, and bringing out many people from that town. All present had much to say about the washing demonstration and the butter and soap making. Alice and Frances Bailey showed artifacts and family heirlooms on Hebron day. Mrs. Mary Walker presented a demonstration of the proper and old-fashioned system of drying flowers for McHenry Day. Everyone who participated in the programs was impressed by the interest of the audience, and certainly attendance at the museum greatly increased. The programs are to be resumed after a late summer rest, and will continue through September and October.

THINGS WE COULD USE

We continue this portion of the Tracer each quarter since not only does it bring in items requested, but it jogs the minds of other people who have saved items for the Society but neglected to bring them to the museum or give them to board members to deliver.

From the president's desk comes this interesting paragraph: "We have been given, literally, a shoe box, packed tightly with snapshot negatives, size 3 1/2 × 5 3/4" The donor, Mrs. Barbara A. Mackey Kaemer of Eden Prairie, Minn. is a daughter of Floyd James Mackey and Clara Krum Mackey, and granddaughter of Curtis Alfred Mackey and Sophronia (Jenny) Jane Gilliland. Mrs. Kaemer thinks all the snapshots were taken in the Union-Marengo area but there is no identification of places or people. They date from 1932 to 1947. Would someone from the Union-Marengo area like to try to identify them? Or some photographer print a few--particularly the ones of buildings or houses?" The Society would be grateful.

GOLD RUSH NAMES SO FAR ACQUIRED

Since 1965, our president, Dorothy McEachren, has been carrying on a correspondence with Mrs. Allen Mogg of Lake County, who started out to write a paper on her county's history and so far has written four booklets. Since Lake and McHenry were once one county, our histories are closely intertwined. Both ladies had much to offer the other. It is from their notes this partial list of "Gold Rushers" was arranged. We publish it here in the hope that if you have a family story of an ancestor having gone to California and his name is not listed, you will send it on to the museum. The names are followed by location and the dates of each person's trip, where they are available.

(The list includes 45 names, some some with facts of their demise. Ask a staff member to see a copy of Tracer #15 if you'd like to see the list with all the details)

ROACH'S HARDWARE

This store which was our first Tracer advertiser from Harvard is 116 years old and still doing business in the same place it started. It is at present operated by a family whose ancestors were pioneers in the Harvard area, but this family did not start the store.

It was established in 1862 by Lewis Bower, later known as Bower and Company, and though it started on a small scale, was said to have forged steadily to the front, In 1867, they hired clerk C. E. Hunt. Five years later, he bought the store with N. B. Helm. Later, he bought into the firm which became Hunt, Helm & Manley. In 1890 Mr. Helm left the firm, after which it was called Manley Bros. & Co. The 1912 book on Harvard stated that it was one of the largest concerns of its kind in northern Illinois or southern Wisconsin.

Besides regular "light and heavy" hardware, they also carried sporting goods, farm machinery, heating and plumbing, harnesses, engines, silos, Ramblers, Overland, E-M-F, Flanders and Brush autos. A.C. was always proud that his automobile was the first car in the county, a claim the Crystal Lake Colbys also took.

Volume V

No. 2 mailed Nov. 24, 1978 (Tracer #16)

CURATOR'S LETTER

Dear Members:

The Board has been busy lately attending meetings and planning future development of the Museum. Regular Board meetings are held on the fourth Monday of each month; with special meetings held to discuss the newly established Planning Committee,

From Your Tracer Editor

Great News! To provide consistent quarterly Tracer delivery, we're bringing Nancy Humphrey Haskins in again to drive our InDesign layout process so we'll be on time with a fresh Tracer issue on a regular schedule.

Here are our upcoming delivery dates:

Spring Issue #181 - May 2025 *Summer Issue #182 - August 2025*
Fall Issue #183 - October 2025 *Winter Issue #184 - January 2026*

A number of new high quality local history feature articles, as you have come to expect, are nearing completion. You'll also see new writing from our talented staff, our board members and volunteers. The concept of a Tracer Editorial Board, as mentioned here from Tracer #20 is being considered. Their focus may include not only content, but consistent style guidelines as we move toward our organization's rebranding process.

Submitting your own writing for the Tracer is always encouraged. Your own local history stories are what we seek. Rough drafts are welcomed!

To help provide ideas, please ask staff to provide you with Tracer back issues - no charge! Honoring our Society's founders and earlier Tracer writers, by bringing their voices back to fresh new Tracer pages is one of my ongoing goals. As our Institutional Archivist, and as a dedicated board member approaching two decades of volunteer service to MCHS, I'm still looking for folks to help with Tracer back issue indexing and other work in our Institutional Archives (IA) workroom (our collection of materials holding much of the rich 62 year history of our own Society & Museum). It's an exciting treasure trove, awaiting further exploration.

I've got Nancy Fike on board - please help with our vital archives effort!

don@mchenrycountyhistory.org 815/814-5075

and you have a very busy group of Directors.

A decision on the furnace has finally been reached - the old gas furnace will be replaced by all new electric heat which will hopefully defray the maintenance costs which have been mounting annually.

One of the main topics of conversation at recent Board meetings has been the Gannon house which is now at the Woodstock fairgrounds. The cabin will soon have a new home in front of the Museum building and will be a welcome addition to our collections here in Union.The plans at this point call for developing an exhibit around a central theme in which a wide variety of artifacts could be used to portray Pioneer life in McHenry County.

Mr. Shuji Kimura will present a talk in Crystal Lake in January on the early architecture of Crystal Lake. This will be the first of a series of meetings to be held throughout the county, which will focus on the communities in which they are held. If any of you have program suggestions or would like to present a program we're anxious to hear from you.

Another thought being hashed over is the possibility of keeping the Museum open on a full time basis for the Summer months. This would offer us an opportunity for increasing revenue as well as allowing a larger number of people the chance to learn something of the history of the county.

The Historical Society has done a tremendous job up to this point and will continue to do so, I'm sure.

When you're called on to help, please do!

Sincerely, Mark Haggitt

Volume V

No. 3 mailed March 15, 1978 (Tracer #17)

MARENGO'S HISTORICAL TOUR

In November, the Marengo Fraternal Order of Police showed interest in a community service project that would also raise some money. In their discussion they had thought of a walk or tour of historical places in Marengo, and the Chief was soliciting the support of MCHS. Co-President Nancy Fike appointed a committee. From this beginning has come the Marengo Historical Tour, planned for May. Five houses have been chosen to exhibit this year. They are the Clemens house on Telegraph, Robinson House, Lois Piper house with its widow walk on West Grant Street; the Francis Muzzy house on the same street with its cupola that makes it such an outstanding piece of architecture, and Chief Westergren's own home on East Washington, which was the St. John house to begin with but to which his family have added the former Ernest Robb house.

1862 MCHENRY COUNTY MAP

This map has been repaired and renovated by using parts of a second map and returned to the museum.

The work was done by Donnelley of Chicago.

All who have seen the map are very pleased. The Historical Society knows of only one other such copy. While such rare things must be handled gently, it is expected that this will be on exhibition when the museum reopens in the spring. The township of Algonquin allocated $1200.00 toward repair.

Volume V

No. 4 mailed May 15, 1979 (Tracer #18)

NEW--AND VERY WELCOME HELP

A note from Dorothy McEachren informs us of really extra help. Norma D. Anderson of Woodstock, a new volunteer has been and will, devote her Tuesdays, from nine to five, typing acknowledgements and doing other typing and general office work for the society. While a new volunteer, she has been a member of the society before. Her help is extremely welcome.

Volume VI

No. 1 mailed Sept. 7, 1979 (Tracer #19)

MORE COMMENTS ON SUNDAY PROGRAMS

Since we were speaking of visitors being welcomed to the Museum, perhaps we may mention some of the programs that have taken place, and some that are to come. Because The Tracer staff has been unable to attend all the Sundays and we do not have reports on everyone, we will only tell you of a few, but be assured that all have been interesting and you will make no mistake in being present at these affairs each Sunday afternoon until the cold weather closes the series.

One of the very successful Sunday afternoon was that of Woodstock in May. Each "Day" finds red stars marking artifacts that have come from that community, and that is what Woodstock concentrated on, they had no extra program that we learned of. Among the things highlighted for the occasion were several pictures in the Music Room--those of Carrie Lawson, costumed for her role in the opera, "Martha" and of Valorous Jones playing his violin for his little granddaughter. Dorothy Lemmers.

There are rocking chairs, spinning wheels, baby buggies and trophies, used or won by Woodstock people. The big hall itself is named for a Woodstock man, Floyd Eckert. Upstairs, there are quilts from Woodstock and in the school room, there is a portrait of Rev. Todd who established the Todd School for Boys, remembered as having educated Orson Welles.

In the professional room, there is a foot operated dental drill donated by Elmer Carlson from 1895; an antique skin scraper donated by Dr. Romberger.

In June, our Alden directors chose to honor the dairy industry, that being dairy month. They did indeed have a program, exhibiting how homemade ice cream was made, how butter was churned, and also how fruits were dried for preservation. Our Alden director, Avis Pankonin, with the superb help of her husband, Herman Pankonin, does a marvelous job on Alden Day each year.

In July, The Harvard directors hired a square dance caller, and the Milk Center Squares donated their time and talent to exhibit the history of Square Dancing to the audience. The Greenwood director, Clara Vogel, has kindly sent The Tracer advance notice of what will be on hand for Greenwood Day in September. They will have someone showing how to dye fabrics with natural dyes as our great grandmothers did; a gentleman will show the way to use a grinding stone and what can be done with it; there will be a caning exhibition, how to reseat a chair, and not how to punish a child or slave. There will also be two things for fun: a spelling bee - they are coming back, you know; and in the music room there will be a real, live fiddler. They had one of the most successful "days" last year in the size of the crowd they drew, and it looks very much as if they will do a most interesting afternoon again this year.

ELECTION OF NEW OFFICERS FOR 1979-1980

At the June board meeting, the following officers were unanimously elected: President Shuji Kimura, VP Jack Satorious, 2nd VP Henry Marlowe, Secretary Nancy Fike, Treasurer Don Hildebrand, Membership Chairman Leta Clark

PRESIDENTS ANNUAL REPORT

Shuji Kimura gave a most interesting report of the past year. He was persuaded to provide The Tracer with a transcript.

(I knew Shuji well. He was an active member of my camera club and worked at Morton Research in Woodstock. He stepped in as board president after Dorothy. This is a thorough report, worth a look in Tracer #19, but too large to include here - ask our staff to see it)

EARLY FACTORIES IN MCHENRY COUNTY

A century ago, almost every town had grist mills, flour mills and saw mills. In Algonquin, the first was built in 1839, 3/4 mile from the Crystal Lake outlet. Another in 1840 on Chunn Creek and a third in 1842 at Algonquin Village. In 1848, a grist mill at that same outlet. By 1877, the saw mills were gone, but the grist mills were flourishing. Alden did not have one, according to the 1877 Directory, until 1873 when a man named Thompson built a steam mill for grinding feed. (this article goes on with details on almost 30 more mills throughout McHenry County)

Volume VI

No. 2 mailed Decemer 4, 1979 (Tracer #20)

SUNDAY PROGRAMS

The president of the board, Shuji Kimura, has plans, including an old-time cider press being operated not only by Shuji himself, but also by the children who would be sampling the apple juice. He had the press on hand one Sunday in 1978, and a good many people hope his program never changes!

(the extensive timeline we compiled for our 60th anniversary in 2023 indicates our annual Cider Fest began around 1978. Shuji kicked this popular event off for us. He loved to press apples!)

MORE THANKS

Because all acquisitions are not mentioned in The Tracer does not mean that all are not appreciated. Letters of thanks go out to every donor, and perhaps the sincerest thanks are those of the visitor who stands and gazes, and comments on the artifact when it is displayed. It is a most enjoyable moment to know that one has helped someone else understand life in McHenry County as it was in previous times.

(Tracer #20 goes on to extensively thank Alice & Leta Clark, Thresile Mulvenna and Ruth Cripe for all their dedicated service and briefly mentions an apparent Tracer Editorial Board.

It concludes with the very first extensive Tracer story, all about an early county factory in Dunham. In Tracer 181, that entire story will be re-published, including the photographs.)

Stay tuned here as our Tracer History unfolds!

Railroads (continued from page 7)

ORIGINS OF ILLINOIS RAILWAY MUSEUM

For years the right of way of the E&B remained abandoned and overgrown. In 1956, members of an interurban group dedicated to the preservation of such equipment, which had set up an area in North Chicago, Illinois, purchased, through a tax delinquency sale, a portion of the old E&B main line just east of Union. In 1964, that equipment wa moved to what has become the present site of the Illinois Railway Museum (IRM) (and of the recently constructed Chicago and North Western Historical Society archives).

PASSENGER SERVICE FADES

Following the return of the C&NW to the private sector from war driven United States Railroad Administration control in 1919, the railroad struggled to rebuild both its finances and infrastructure. The C&NW was beset by an increasing loss of passenger revenue due to the rapid increase of paved roadways. Under the administration of Illinois Governor Lennington "Hard Roads Len" Small from 1921 to 1929, US 20 had been paved, leading to an increasing desertion of local rail passengers to automobiles. One bright spot was bulk milk transportation to Chicago by rail from both Marengo and Union.

Still, those communities did not generate nearly enough revenue for the railroad to sustain voluminous service to them. In fact, the health of the C&NW's "Freeport Line" actually depended on the vitality of Rockford's industries. Rail service to Marengo and Union was contingent on them to draw rail traffic from and to Chicago. Rockford was also rail-served by the Milwaukee Road, the Illinois Central and the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy railroad. Four-way competition for traffic, a growing agricultural depression from the mid 1920s, and growing truck competition, did nothing to ease the increasing economic woes of the company. H. Roger Grant noted in his history of the C&NW, THE NORTH WESTERN, (page 153) that the road's president, Fred Sargent, "realized that the company possessed a physical plant with obsolete parts. He grasped the importance of closing scores of small-town stations and trimming the system's vast network of feeder lines."

Sargent's actions to accomplish these goals were not enough to stave off the company's fall into bankruptcy in 1935. Passenger service to Marengo and Union was much affected by the closings. While between 1910 and 1925 there were, according to C&NW published time tables, four passenger trains stopping at Marengo, by 1935 the only C&NW passenger service to Marengo was by bus. A passenger train was reinstituted on the "Freeport Line" by 1939 (#703 west and #706 east) but with an inconvenient schedule for Marengoans. In September 1949, A. R. Seder, a C&NW vice-president, asked the passenger traffic manager to report as to whether that train was profitable. The report stated that it was not.

Maurice Shurtleff, a wealthy lumber and coal dealer out of Marengo (and son of a well-known Speaker of the Illinois State General Assembly) attempted to keep #s 703 and 706 from being discontinued. Testimony before the Illinois Commerce Commission dragged on into January 13, 1950, when Maurice came before the commission. On the same day, the C&NW's assistant solicitor wrote to Lowell Hastings, the C&NW's general solicitor, that "the testimony of Mr. Maurice Shurtleff was not damaging [to the discontinuance of the trains] in any way and, in fact, I think was of assistance to us in showing that there is no need at present time for the two trains under consideration [for discontinuance]." Shurtleff unsuccessively appealed to his federal representative, Chauncey Reed, for help, and the Illinois Commerce Commission decreed that train #s 703 and 706 would be discontinued as of April 15, 1950, leaving the whole "Freeport Line" without passenger traffic. The ancient railroad water tank in Marengo came down in front of a large crowd in August 1950. The large passenger depot in Rockford was removed in 1958.

REDUCED FREIGHT TRAFFIC

Freight traffic on the line with two daily way freights travelling to service industries all along the line in 1948 also saw reductions. By 1955, only one way freight serviced the line each way. On June 26, 1962, a notice went out to train crews still working the line that "the Rockford station will be closed as a communicating office."

With almost all of the sidings on the line between Elgin and Cherry Valley having been taken out and with the C&NW providing only minor freight service to Rockford, the survival of the line was clearly in jeopardy. 1964 was a critically important year for the line. A year earlier, Chrysler Motor Company had decided to

continued on page 12

Winning Essay - 2024 Nancy Fike Scholarship

Camryn Cook: America's Electoral Puzzle

Written by our winning author, now a freshman at Dartmouth University, where she plays NCAA Division One Rugby, and studies Economics/Government and Spanish

Our topic for submissions was:

"2024 is a Presidential election year and we are certain to hear further criticism of the Electoral College. Explain how the Electoral College system of voting works and why the Founding Fathers incorporated it into the Constitution. What "problems" have arisen with it in previous elections? Why is it so criticized today and what alternatives to it are proposed? Be sure to state your opinion on this issue."

Belief in the power of the people is pervasive in every bit of our nation's history. This is what facilitates democracy, and what allows us to make the decisions that influence our nation as a whole. One of the most important decisions the people have to make is who to select to lead our country as President of the United States. Since the first presidential election of George Washington, every Commander-In-Chief has been elected by the Electoral College. However, not everyone has been elected by popular vote of the people.

The Electoral College was written into Article II of the Constitution during its drafting in 1787. During the drafting of the Constitution, several ideas for how to elect the President emerged, including selection by Congress, election by state legislatures, and election by the popular vote. All of these ideas were struck down in the interest of creating a system that both limited corruption and maintained balance between state and federal power, but also checked the extent to which people would only vote for candidates from their own states. This was an issue due to the vastness and lack of communication between the colonies. As candidates wouldn't be able to campaign from Massachusetts to Georgia, citizens in every state wouldn't have information about each candidate, and simply vote for whoever was from their state. In order to prevent this, the founding fathers devised a plan that centered on a committee called The College of Electors, what we know today as the Electoral College.

The Electoral College is composed of voting members that eventually cast their votes for presidential candidates. Since 1836, all states except for South Carolina (until 1880), Maine, and Nebraska allocate electoral college votes based on which candidate won the popular vote within each state. That is, what we consider to be Presidential elections every four years in November really just decides who the electors of your state choose to vote for. However, not every state gets an equal number of electors. The proportionment of these electoral votes is based on the number of seats in Congress each state has. All states have at least three votes, for two senators and one representative, but the largest states who benefit from additional seats in the House of Representatives, like California, that number can be bumped up to their allotment of 54. This proportionment is exactly what leads to a lot of the controversy surrounding the Electoral College around election time.

When some states are valued higher than others, politicians, obviously, put more effort into securing those votes. Although most people have a good idea of what states will vote which way, no conservative candidate is going to put a ton of time and money into politicking in Massachusetts, or a liberal candidate in Alabama. Because some votes are deemed safer than others, states where predicting is a little less cut-and-dry become swing-states. These swing states can make or break elections. Naturally, candidates on the road to the presidency funnel countless hours and dollars into swinging the vote into their favor. Criticism comes due to the fact that when certain states become more important, one person equals more than one vote, a principle established in the 14th Amendment. And thus, I believe, the power inherent to the founding ideals of the nation becomes unevenly distributed amongst the people.

Throughout history, three presidents have won the electoral vote, but not the popular vote. These men are Benjamin Harrison, George W. Bush, and Donald Trump. As Bush and Trump were both elected within the past 25 years, their statuses as Commander-In-Chief have lately prompted substantial calls from the public to reassess the function of the Electoral College. When a presidential candidate earns 2.8 million more votes than another candidate and still loses, the country must consider whether or not the convention that allowed that to happen is conducive to our dearly held democratic principles. Still, consideration is just the beginning. An actual Constitutional amendment is what is needed to formally change or remove the Electoral College from our electoral system. There are two major proposals for what this amendment may look like. The first idea is a system similar to the Electoral College where, like Maine and Nebraska, each district is given one electoral vote, and if a candidate decisively wins the popular vote of the state, they are awarded the additional two electoral votes that would represent their seats in the Senate. The second idea being the National Popular Vote Agreement, where states sign onto an agreement to allocate all of their electoral votes to the winner of the popular vote of the country (National Popular Vote). While the first alternative has support among constitutional scholars, the National Popular Vote Agreement is more heavily supported by the people, and the easiest to achieve, as it would remove amending the Constitution from the equation. As 15 states and D.C. have already signed onto the agreement, I believe that this is a viable solution that should be afforded effort by those who seek to restore the value of the people's vote.

The Electoral College is a system that had virtue during its conception, but has since become almost obsolete. It has allowed several Leaders of the Free World to become elected by the minority, causing misrepresentation of the nation at large and, by making some votes have less significance than others a decrease in the people's confidence in their ability to make change. By reforming the Electoral College, America can take a step in the right direction towards creating a more direct democracy for the people, by the people.

See page 13 for details on the 2025 Nancy Fike Scholarship, now $1,500.

Railroads (continued from page 10)

construct a major automobile plant which would build Dodge and Plymouth autos west of Belvidere and generate a great deal of traffic for the C&NW. The railroad built a large yard for auto racks as well as trackage into the plant. A small engine house was also constructed in the new yard. The plant opened in 1965 employing over 6,000 people at full production.

Additionally in 1965, the Illinois Railway Museum (IRM) contracted with the C&NW for a rail connection to their newly acquired property. For the most part, traffic on the "Freeport Line" waxed and waned with the market for Chrysler's products. In the 21st century, Chrysler was sold to different auto producers. Chrysler became a part of Fiat Corporation and later a multi-national conglomerate called Stellantis. Into 2022, the plant in Belvidere produced Jeep Cherokee vehicles. Because of the Covid pandemic, the shortage of computer chips, and other reasons, in early 2023, the Stellantis corporation announced that the plant in Belvidere would be closing.

With the plant closed, traffic level on the line is currently in a "down" cycle. There was little demand for freight traffic on what is currently referred to as the "Belvidere" line. Recently, it was announced that the former "Chrysler" plant will be utilized as an auto parts distribution point and, possibly, see the opening of a new vehicle assembly line. Additionally, an electric vehicle battery plant is being planned for the same area. A second reason which brings hope for increased traffic on the line is the rapidly increasing population around Huntley, Illinois (the site of a massive "Sun City" development) and the expanding economy of Rockford. Both communities are lobbying hard for the line to be used by either Amtrack or METRA to provide some type of commuter service to and from Chicago.

OLD MARENGO DEPOT RELOCATION

One significant artifact from the Galena and Chicago Union railroad days still exists. The old station in Marengo, possibly constructed in the early 1850s, still stands, but not on its original site. The small depot building in Union was also still standing and, after the IRM moved to their current site, it was thought that building would make a good depot there. When that group obtained permission to cart the building to their grounds, it turned out that building was in too weak of a condition to be moved. Since the depot in Marengo was still standing in somewhat better condition and was owned by the City of Marengo which had no real use for the building, IRM obtained permission in the mid 1960s to move the building to their site. As Fred Ash relates (RAIL& WIRE, November/December 1998, page 14), three days were required to jack-up and cut apart the structure. The depot's interior partitions were removed, the roof was detached, and the main structure was cut in half.

Thursday, July 20, 1967, saw the actual movement of the depot to the Museum. It took an additional day to position the depot on its new foundation, but that was only the beginning. Once assembled, a new roof was required and 100 window panes were glazed. The interior was reworked. In its original plan, the passenger and freight sections were separated by the office. To accommodate the Museum's needs, a hallway connecting the waiting rooms and freight rooms was installed. The hallway wall was relieved by a ticket window salvaged from another depot.

Today, thanks to the work of IRM volunteers, one can look through a window of Marengo's old Galena and Chicago Union depot and, if lucky, watch a freight train on the original right of way go "blowing through town" or stand on the platform and mentally go back to when the line was a busy steel highway. While the life of the line may be in jeopardy, as long as one can touch the depot's 172-year-old wall, the memory of the history of the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad can never be forgotten.

AMERICA 250

Visit this site: < **america250.org** > to learn more.

Reminder: 2026 will mark the **250th anniversary** of America's founding, and **July 4th, 2026** is the **50th anniversary** of our own museum's opening day. You'll soon learn more about what we're planning - stay tuned!

A program to engage students nationwide to celebrate America's 250th anniversary:

America's Field Trip < **america250.org/fieldtrip** >

National Submission Deadline: April 25, 2025

This contest invites students in grades 3–12 to share their perspectives on what America means to them — and earn the opportunity to travel for field trip experiences at some of the nation's most iconic historic and cultural landmarks.

Get Your Copy!

More Quilts of the
HERITAGE QUILTERS

Presented by
The McHenry County Historical Society
Union, Illinois

Since 1987, the **Heritage Quilters** have been very generous with their time and talents, making unique, hand-sewn quilts to benefit our society.

Their first quilt history book (now sold out) was published in 2011. This **second edition**, expanded to a full 48 pages, includes photographs of their twelve latest quilts and a new detailed narrative by **Jan Knight** (interviewed by Nancy Fike in Tracer 179), to help commemorate their dedicated ongoing work. This edition is fascinating, and will again become a collector's item.

To purchase your own copy, call our office, visit <mchenrycountyhistory.org/museum-store> or send email to <info@mchenrycountyhistory.org>

All proceeds benefit the society.

Quilt Book CONTENTS

-Introduction
-How We Make a New Quilt

-Our Quilts, Year by Year

2012 .....Old Favorite
2013 .....Jenny's Legacy
2014 .....Mostly Morris
2015 .....Mood Indigo
2016 .....Pieceful Garden
2017 .....Threads of Friendship
2018 .....Forever Poppies
2019 .....Honoring Adelia
2020 .....Fit To Be Tied
2021 .....Small Town Square
2023 .....Heritage Stars
2024 .....Prairie Basket

-Our very own quilter extraordinaire
-Changing of the Guard
-Illinois and County Quilt Registration
-Museum Collection and Storage
-Huntley restoration
-Care and storage of quilts in private collections
-By the Way, Did you Know...
-Bibliography
-Sponsors

2025 Nancy Fike Scholarship - Deadline April 11th

See page 11 of this Tracer for last year's winning essay.

ELIGIBILITY: The Nancy Fike Scholarship is open to graduating seniors or first-year college students who have graduated from a McHenry County high school and who are, or plan on, studying history, education or the social sciences. Applicants must have a minimum GPA of 3.0. Children and grandchildren of MCHS Board members and staff are not eligible.

Full application instructions are available by calling our office at 815-923-2267

TOPIC: In 2025, institutions throughout the United States will begin planning events and celebrations of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, which takes place on July 4th, 2026. This milestone is known as the Semiquincentennial. In recognition of this important commemoration, applicants will consider and choose two of these three aspects of our nation's history to explore further in a well-researched essay.

1. Discuss some of the technical and scientific advances of the last 250 years.

2. Describe environmental challenges resulting from scientific advancements and their effect on population growth.

3. Explain how equality and civil rights have advanced over the last 250 years.

Recent Fike Scholarship Winners &Themes:
2024 Camryn Cook - America's Electoral Puzzle
2023 Tom Oeffling - Importance of Fair and Transparent Elections
2022 McHenry County's Contribution to the World War II Effort
2021 Grace Rogers - Reflecting on Polio Battle Brings Clarity to Current COVID Struggles
2020 Anna Karcz - 50th Anniversary of Earth Day - Enviroment and Global Climate
2019 Kaitlin McCann - Impacts of World War One on Today's Society

How We Dodged a Bullet

(before our museum was even open to the public)

When in the course of human events there is a dramatic moment about to become a catastrophic event and that catastrophe is, by pure luck and a former wise decision, avoided, the potential happening is quickly forgotten and goes unrecorded in history. This writing is intended to describe such an event in the early life of the McHenry County Historical Museum in Union, Illinois, during the early winter of 1975.

Some of the details in the story may not be exactly correct due to my memory limitations. The actual happening and sequence are very true.

By DON HILDEBRAND, former board member

The McHenry County Historical Society, at the suggestion of its leader Dorothy McEachren, purchased the vacant 1870 Union High School building at a public auction in 1971. Her objective was to repurpose it as a county history museum.

Incorporated in 1963, MCHS had some donated artifacts scattered in various places, but no permanent home. After the purchase, about four years were spent gathering more artifacts and converting the building into displays for public viewing.

The McHenry County Historical Museum officially opened to the public on July 4, 1976 – our country's bicentennial year. The 1870, two-story stone and brick building sat on about 2 acres along Main Street in Union. The original building featured room additions in 1928 and a gymnasium in 1948. The building was vacated in 1969 by Union District 8 school board when an addition was added to the newer Evergreen Park School in town.

Several century old cottonwood trees adorned the property. A Mobil service station and garage was located across Main Street, directly west of the school. A single-story, frame warehouse was across Washington Street to the south. Single-family residences bordered the school within a few feet of the school building to the east. The original 1870 building had a large wooden frame bell tower above the roof.

I served on the MCHS board of directors and as treasurer at the time of a nearly catastrophic event. After the school building was purchased in 1971, the board was concerned about the safety of the building while it was unoccupied. The concern mostly was about the possibility of vandalism and burglary. In our town of about 600 people, law enforcement amounted to a part-time local cop and our McHenry County Sheriff's Department.

There was an outside alarm bell that was activated if an exterior door was opened when the building was unoccupied. It was loud and could be heard all over town. Since I was the only board member/officer who lived in Union, about 200 yards from the museum, I answered several calls from responding deputies. Only one such call was because of a "break in." Two teenagers broke a window in the kitchen area to enter and got "spooked" once inside. They opened an overhead door to escape and the alarm sounded.

Alarm sensors were on the front door and the gym overhead door and the false alarms stemmed from switch malfunctions or lightning. We should have been more concerned about fire than theft or vandalism. The village had a volunteer fire department, two pumper trucks, and an elevated "ball" shaped water tower. More concerning is that the school building had no working fire alarm.

Our MCHS board decided, shortly after acquiring the building, to convert what was the school office into a small apartment big enough for two people. This was done. The idea was to seek an adult couple that would take up residence in the apartment, rent-free just to have someone on the premises at night and weekends. In hindsight, that was a wise decision.

I believe our first occupant was a young, single man who occupied the apartment for about a year. The next occupants were a couple. The man traveled some in his work, but the wife was there most of the time.

I don't remember the exact year or month that the near catastrophic event I am relating occurred but I believe it was in the early winter of 1974 or 1975. I believe the museum still had not opened to the public. I do well remember that sometime between 9 and 10 p.m. I got a phone call from the lady tenant. Since I was the only board member living in Union, I was used to getting calls at irregular hours to perform some duty for the museum or for an alarm incident.

The lady said, "I'm here in the museum by myself and I can't get the heating system to shut off. It is extremely hot in here, even with the windows open." I was familiar with the hot water heating system for the school building. A gas-fired boiler in the basement, under the 1928 addition, heated water in a closed system, which was pumped to various radiators in the building. I had been doing "handyman" work around the museum and was familiar with the basement layout.

I advised our tenant that I would come right over to see what could be done. In about four minutes I was at the building, where I noted a door and some windows were open. The lady met me at the door and I immediately noted that she had just cause for alarm. The building's interior was extremely hot. I immediately opened the basement door and descended a short flight of stairs. The furnace greeted me with a roaring fire in the firebox. Part of the sheet metal on top of the firebox was a cherry red. The whole furnace was smoking due to burning paint. The heated water pipes were pinging and clanging as they were trying to expand from the heat.

I immediately went to the main gas shutoff valve to the furnace and turned off the gas fuel. The fire went out and the system began to cool down. An examination of the furnace by a technician the next day confirmed that the furnace was a complete loss and the firebox ruined. The water pipes were twisted beyond repair or replacement. The hot water heating system for the building was never used again.

The museum survived the winter with the use of electric space heaters and essentially leaving a large part of the building unheated in cold weather. No big deal was made of what could have happened. But over the years I have relived that situation and speculated on what could have happened had no one been there when the thermostat switch and the high temperature safety shutoff switches on the furnace failed.

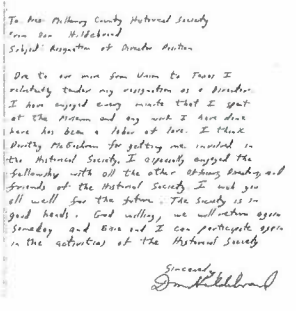
In my opinion, when I shut off the gas supply valve to the furnace, the basement was within minutes of exploding into a flaming fire. The heat was intense. The 50-year-old dry wood floor joists, just a few inches above the furnace were about to burst into flame. The small amount of asbestos insulation above the furnace could not have prevented it.

Once on fire, the flames would have traveled quickly through the old wood floor and into the stairwell leading to the second floor and the attic. The bell tower, being directly connected to the attic by a short ladder, would undoubtedly made the bell tower a type of chimney for the whole building. In a very short time the building would have been engulfed in uncontrollable fire – even with the assistance of neighboring fire departments.

If a strong west wind was blowing, a not uncommon event, the flames from the school building would attack the nearby homes where the fire might have jumped from one house to the next.

So, what if the MCHS directors had not provided a person in the building when the furnace switches failed and the furnace continued to run wild until it flashed into flames? Credit the board's wisdom and a little plain dumb luck for preventing the loss of that old school building on a cold winter's night. ❧

Elsie & Don Hildebrand at 2014 Heritage Fair



To: Pres McHenry County Historical Society
From: Don Hildebrand
Subject: Resignation of Director Position

Due to our move from Union to Texas I reluctantly tender my resignation as a Director. I have enjoyed every minute that I spent at the Museum and any work I have done has been a labor of love. I thank Dorothy McEachren for getting me involved in the Historical Society. I especially enjoyed the fellowship with all the other Officers, Directors, and friends of the Historical Society. I wish you all well for the future. The Society is in good hands. God willing, we will return again someday and Elsie and I can participate again in the activities of the Historical Society.

Sincerely,
Don Hildebrand

To: Pres McHenry County Historical Society
From: Don Hildebrand
Subject: Resignation of Director Position

Due to our move from Union to Texas I reluctantly tender my resignation as a Director. I have enjoyed every minute that I spent at the Museum and any work I have done has been a labor of love. I thank Dorothy McEachren for getting me involved in the Historical Society. I especially enjoyed the fellowship with all the other Officers, Directors, and friends of the Historical Society. I wish you all well for the future. The Society is in good hands. God willing, we will return again someday and Elsie and I can participate again in the activities of the Historical Society.

Sincerely,
(October 4, 1984) Don Hildebrand

Editor's note: I discovered this fascinating story in an unlabeled folder, deep inside our Institutional Archives. After reading it through, I called Nancy Fike to see if she remembered this occurance. She did not, but she had Mr. Hildebrand's phone number (he's around 95 years old). Unfortuntely, I was not able to reach him, but checked to see if he and his wife are still active members. In fact, they are. So, all these years later, his story has emerged, along with a photo and his heartfelt letter. Yet another example of what our Institutional Archives holds about our own organizational history!

Mystery Photo

AGAIN, no guesses were submitted for the photo below that appeared in Tracer 179!

At right, in 1957, are a proud Future Farmers of America member, two 4-H Federation officers and McHenry County's Assistant Farm Advisor.

Your mission: Send us their names.

Email your answers, with "Tracer Mystery Photo" in the subject line to: don@mchenrycountyhistory.org

Old Mystery Photo

BY MAGGIE CRANE

Gus Persson took the photo at left of a carnival set up on the east side of Woodstock in 1906. At first glance, it seems to be the McHenry County fairgrounds, but no.

Answer: The location of this photo is the intersection of E. Judd and E. Seminary Avenues, next to the land where the Emerson (later called Woodstock) Typewriter factory would be built. Small businesses now occupy the site, the long-time location of Jones Locker. This carnival was held to raise funds to build the new Congregational Church on Dean Street in Woodstock. The successful fundraiser was a good start to reach the goal of $12,000. The carnival company was called Squanderland, and they held indoor carnivals as well as outdoor carnivals in Woodstock.

Early Photographs WANTED

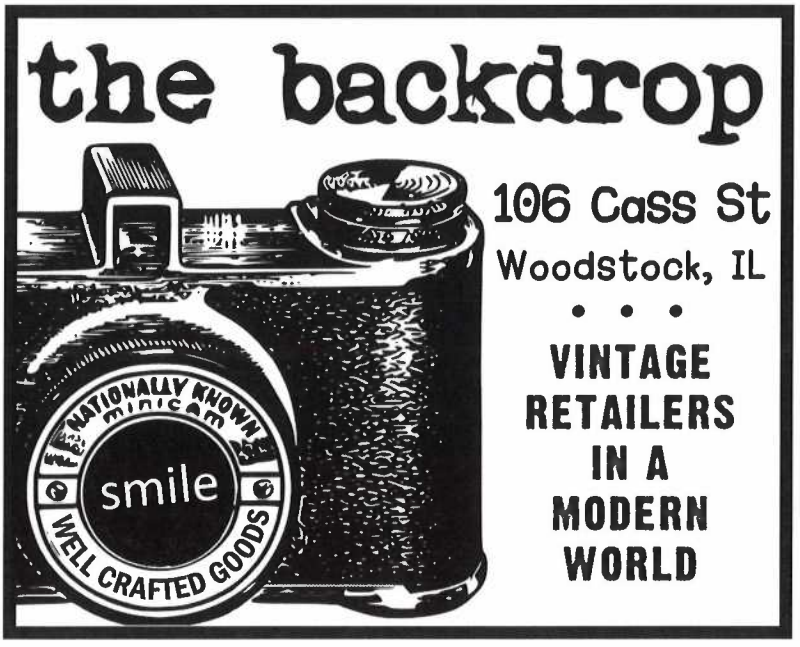
In these pages, you'll continue to see photographs depicting local history, our Society's own history, our generous members, the many hours of dedicated volunteer activity, decades of staff and board member work, speakers, events, celebrations and cooperation with other McHenry County nonprofits and regional local history organizations.

We're always looking for more MCHS-related images from you.

Send them to don@mchenrycountyhistory.org

Contact us to place YOUR Tracer ad.

Many thanks to our long-time sponsor:



Tracer

A Membership Benefit since May, 1974

Not-For-Profit Corporation
U.S. Postage
PAID
McHenry, IL 60050
Permit No. 84

published by the **McHenry County Historical Society & Museum**

An Illinois Not-for-profit Corporation
6422 Main Street P.O. Box 434 Union, Illinois 60180
815-923-2267 Email: info@mchenrycountyhistory.org

See and learn more here :
instagram.com/mchenrycountyhistory
facebook.com/McHenryCountyHistoricalSociety
youtube.com/@mchenrycountyhistoricalmuseum/videos

Exhibit Grand Opening
April 26th 11am - 4pm

Weavers & Spinners
Usable Fibers in McHenry County

We are a Blue Star Museum
arts.gov/initiatives/blue-star-museums

Page 11: Read Camryn Cook's Winning Fike Scholarship Essay

FYI: Over 1200 items (within 7 collections) are available here:
woodstockpubliclibraryarchives.omeka.net

THE TRACER IS PRINTED & MAILED BY
COPY EXPRESS
Print • Copy • Design • Promote
copyexpressyes.com

New in our MCHS Research Library...

{973.7 And} Andruss, Dwight
[Civil War Diaries]
: 1863, 1864,1865

{367} Ladies Home Circle
Marengo Ladies: Marengo, Illinois
Programs for 1988-1993, 1995-2003, 2005-2006, 2008-2009, 2012-2016

{353 McC} McHenry CountyConservation District - Celebrating 50 Years - 2021
78p, illustrated

{921 Sta} Stamm, Arthur
My Life & a History of the Stamm Family
Mt. Morris: Cumlara Publishing House, n.d.
270p, illustrated

{811 Wai} Waite, Franklin S., D.D.S.
Poems along Route 70, n.d.
43p, illistrated

{250 RIL} Riley United Methodist Church
In Remembrance
[Memorials from Church History and Record Books]
[also, Church Bulletins]
5 Volumes: 1939-1973,1974-1980, 1981-1990, 1991-2001, 2002-2003

{929 Fre} Schaefer, Sister Victricia
Living with Tragedy: Mary and Stephen Freund - Sept. 1979 14p

{929 Sch} Schaefer Homestead
32p, illustrated

{250 Uni Lutheran} St. John's Lutheran Church, Union, Illinois
Pictorial Directory: 1986, 1991

{929 Nor} Lukas, Diane Miles
Thomas Norton of McHenry County and his Decendants
Written and compiled by Diane Miles Lukas
May 2024 80p, Illustrated

{393 McH} Woodlawn Cemetery Association
[Plans and Specifications for Proposed Roadway Improvements in Woodlawn Cemetery in the City of McHenry, McHenry County, Illinois, 1969] - 18p plus specifications
[also, Minutes June 2, 1914-June 6, 1938 and By Laws thru 1958] 4 volumes

[Video 610 Adu] Adult and Child Rehab Center Telethons [video} 3/1/91, 1998 "Benny the Bull", 2007

[385 Lew] Lewnard, James E.
Chicago & North Western : The Harvard Line, Chicago to Janesville - LaMirada, CA: Four Ways West Publications
(c) 2023 176p: Ill.

[977.3221 Bull Valley (Village)
Bull Valley] Living with the Land : The Village of Bull Valley, Illinois : A Conceptual Development Framework for the Village of Bull Valley - as the first phase in the establishment of a historic district and the activation, adaptive reuse and commercialization of village property for the benefit of the community. / Faculty & Students from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, December 2022 : Ill.

We're Still Seeking issues of the Fox Valley Mirror

(especially 1930s)

FVM was published in Carpentersville from 1932 to 1947.